PRISM

The Prism 1996

The Peace College Literary magazine

The Prism

Table of Contents

1st place - Poetry Prize winners
The Altered Woman (Christie Manley), *Violation Silence* (Samantha Jones) 1
3rd place - Prose Prize winner
God's Mysterious Ways (Abby Cavenaugh) 2
2nd place - Poetry Prize winner
Orca Dance (Amy Cavenaugh) 4
How I Died (Christie Manley), *An Addition* (Lora Lamb) 5
3rd place - Poetry Prize Winner
Dancing Amongst the Angels (Hunter Payne) 6
Blue Velvet Painting (Fran Miller) 7
Small Grandness, Yin/Yang (Erika Sexton) 9
My Heart, I Think, Is A Dancer (Christie Manley),
3rd place - Poetry Prize Winner
Nightly Ritual (Erika Sexton) 10
3rd place - Prose Prize Winner
Happy Curtains (Ellen Giard) 11
2nd place - Poetry Prize Winner
A Million Miles from Anywhere (Abby Cavenaugh)
Where Are You? (Amy Cavenaugh) 13
Cup of Coffee With Conversation (Samantha Jones), *Mocha* (Ellen Giard) 14
2nd place - Prose Prize Winner
Discovering Daddy With The Divine Help of Neil Young (Samantha Jones) 16
D'Artagnan (Amy Cavenaugh), *Memories* (Joanna Shapiro) 19
1st place - Prose Prize Winner
Beneath The Veil (Ann Currier) 20

With photos and artwork by: Christie Manley, Haley Hall, Renee Frye, Allison Sherman, and Katherine Costa

Special thanks also to Dr. Linda Lumsden, Sherry Boykin, and the professor and students of the Graphic Design Class, as well as the judges: Dr. Janet Wester, Dr. Valerie Hall, and Catherine Hart for all their help.

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The Altered Woman

Times uncounted the man loved her.
When the tide of his passion retreated,
She was left alone with her thoughts.
One day, normal in every other respect,
There sounded a great rumble inside of her,
There was a gathering of gravid clouds
Under her skirtfolds.
The woman wept aloud with joy.

She was a woman transformed,
Becoming more precious to the earth than before;
She now carried Human Life.
Nearly every woman is a Goddess
For some time.
It was her time.

In the leaden weight of night,
With the man's soft breath
Against her back,
She would reverently touch her belly,
The domed-ceiling castle of her issue,
And whisper, as had the man
So long ago,
"This is at last bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh."
The woman had been altered.

by C. M. Manley

prize page 1st

Violation Silence

Blanching my knuckles as I yank
Fists full of greasy hair,
Writhing in my own hell
My screams invigorate brutality.
You allow no remorse
To crawl from breadth
Of my vocal chords.
I force you
To hear me:
Let zero be forgotten.

Echoing sobs climax your violation.
Trying without merit
To salvage my sanity
I ask
Do my screams wake you
From your guilty sweat?
You took my precious perfect
Molding it into perversion
With solitary action
For your satisfaction.
How can you embrace your deception,
Knowing why my shell is rotten?

Wanted to ignore you
When I saw her
Holding your hand,
Laughing at my grimy dress,
Chapped lips,
Defective hands
That you restrained last night.
Dress you soiled left me
Permanently stained,
Unlike your unpolluted image:
Whole other life you portray
With her ignorance to protect your crime.

Pointless are these words,
Thriving on silence
As a replacement for my pain.

by Samantha Jones

God's Mysterious

I had just returned home from a night of fun at the North Carolina State Fair on a cool Autumn Thursday night. My twin sister, Amy, our friends Lesley, Lee, and I had had to walk *forever* to get back to Lee's car and my feet were killing me. I couldn't wait to get back to my dorm room and get those too-tight shoes off my feet, put on my pajamas, and crawl into my soft, warm bed and go to sleep. Unfortunately, once I got back to school, my hopes were dashed; Lesley wanted me to walk to the Computer Center with her to check on something while lucky Amy got to go ahead to the room and rest. I thought I was never going to be able to get to bed! But when I finally walked into my room, I knew I wouldn't be going to sleep anytime soon anyway.

Amy, who is also my roommate, was sitting on her bed, tears running down her face. Immediately, my heart stopped. *Oh no,* I thought. *It's one of the cats—why do all my pets have to die?* "What's wrong?," I asked dreadingly.

"I can't tell you," Amy cried, shaking her head. "There's a message on the machine for you."

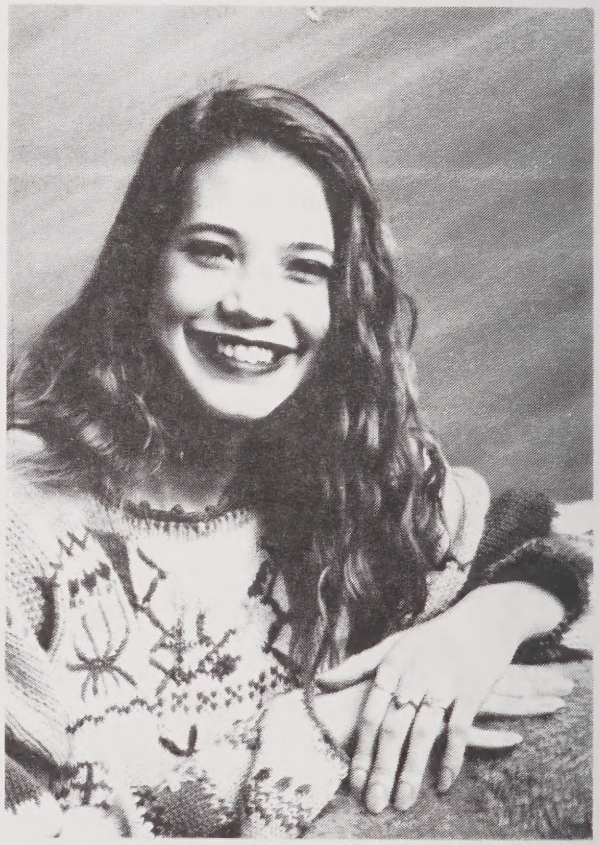
I took the long walk over to the answering machine on my nightstand, two feet away that at that moment seemed like a mile. A million thoughts were racing through my head — *it's one of the cats again. What if it's Rex?; oh no, I love that dog so much. What if it's one of my grandparents?*—but I pushed the button on the machine and—

Beep. "Abby, this is Angela Jackson's sister. She passed away this morning. Bye." *Beep-beep.*

Not one of the cats, or the dog, or my grandparents...one of my very best friends.

I don't remember what happened then. Suddenly, I was crying, hugging Amy, then I was putting on my pajamas, going through my nightly routine, my vision blurred by tears. I tried to stop

Angela once said: "Most of the time I'm happy so every moment is my happiest moment."



Angela Jackson *(photo provided by Abby Cavenaugh)*

W a y s

crying—I knew that was the last thing Angela would have wanted—but I *couldn't* stop. I was so shocked...and sad...and angry. I never met Angela. I only knew her through letters and phone calls, and I had only been writing to her for about a year and a half. But during that short year and a half, we became very close, and she inspired me more than any other person I have ever met. I never told her that. We wrote long, 20 and 30-page letters to each other and talked about *everything*, but I never told her just how much I admired her. That will always be one of my biggest regrets.

Angela had cystic fibrosis, and she got sick a lot, but she never let that get her down and depressed. She never wanted anyone to feel sorry for her, and she had a happy life. She told me once when I asked her what was the happiest moment of her life: "Most of the time I'm happy, so every moment is my happiest moment." Most people with perfect health couldn't say that.

Every now and then, I find myself getting angry with God for taking wonderful people like Angela while allowing hideous people like murderers and rapists to live. Life can be so unfair, and at one point, I was letting myself wonder, "What is the point of going on? Is there a point?," but then, I received a letter from another pen pal and good friend of mine, Kerry MacLaurin Knight (from Nevada). Enclosed with her letter was a Xeroxed copy of sonogram pictures of the child that at the time, she was five months pregnant with. I felt tears coming to my eyes as I found the tiny feet, the eyes, and the arms.

God may see fit to take some lives, but He also brings the miracle of new life into the world. So I guess the old saying is true: God works in mysterious ways.

On March 1, 1996, Laura Knight, Kerry's baby, was born. And I know, wherever she was, Angela was smiling.

by Abby Cavenaugh

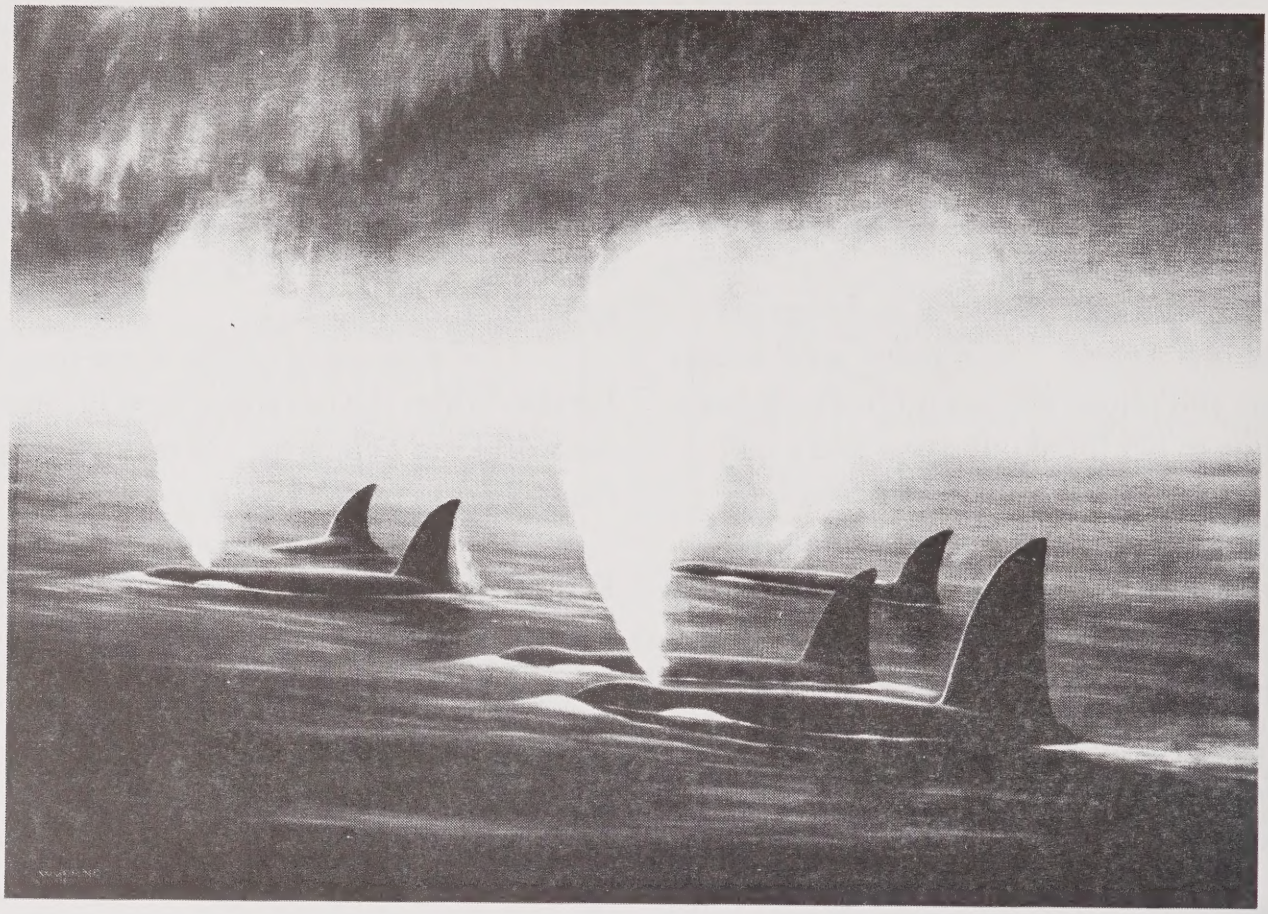


photo contributed by Amy Cavenaugh

2nd place prize winner

Orca Dance

The pointed black dorsal fin
rises slowly up to the surface
slicing the water
Up it goes...
followed by the beast's great head
adorned with white eyepatches

Beside him rises his mate
her smooth black skin glistening
in the morning sun.
Spray spurts from her blowhole,
settling in the air for moments afterward
as a smoky mist.
She dives back into the blue...

And now the baby springs up
water cascading in small waves
around its milk-white and ebony frame.
Then, following its mother's lead,
the calf descends into the billows.

Suddenly a great one leaps from the icy sea
twirling in the air in acrobatic display,
And then it plunges home.

As the last one shoots up and over
the water,
the pod moves on,
leaving awe and wonder
in their wake.

by Amy Cavenaugh

How I Died

Watch my life
and you'll watch me
F a i n t i n g .

I have been falling
since the start,
and have yet to touch the floor.

Watch my life
and you'll see me
Struggle.

Feeble hands for
Fading eyes
and a heart that's gone all [illegible].

No angel wings,
No poet's grace,
No pity for the Child.

All my life has been Fainting;
a long process of
F a l l i n g D o w n .

by Christie Manley

An Addition

Time without you is lost
I find myself not finding myself
I wonder around in **d i s a r r a y**
I sleep without dreams
I awake to find nothing
One touch of your hand brings life unto me
A touch of your body livens my soul
For all the disappointment I've gained
standing here alon
Doesn't matter
For I know now, I'm not alone

by Lora Lamb

artwork by Christie Manley

Dancing Amongst the Angels

Yesterday
Gigi and I would sing songs
of kittens,
snowballs,
and being sixteen.
She would pat my leg,
same place
same rhythm
as always,
and rub my back
with soft, arthritis-stricken hands,
that played *Jesus Loves Me*
on the church organ,
and smelled of Jean Nate.
She would squeeze
my cheeks,
then kiss
my lips
and say, "I love you."

Today,
we do not sing songs
of kittens,
snowballs,
or being sixteen.
We do not sing
at all.
I cannot hear
the church hymns
being played on the organ,
nor feel
the rhythm of her hand
patting my thigh.

She just holds my hand
and squeezes,
and I kiss her cheek,
and cry.
Today,
she lies in bed
motionless
smelling of hospital
and sometimes,
only sometimes,
does she smile.
She looks
into my eyes,
with a blank stare.
She does not know me,
her grandchild.

But tomorrow,
Tomorrow is a new day,
a new beginning-
a new farewell.
Tomorrow,
she will not smell
of hospital.
She will not
look at me,
nor will she squeeze my hand.
Tomorrow,
she will not
breathe.
And deep,
deep down inside
I will smile
and so will Gigi.
So will the angels.

by Hunter Payne

A Blue Velvet Painting

Wooden shacks, tin roofs, chicken wire, and luck characterized the Antique Flea Market carved into the side of a single mountain within the Appalachian Chain. Steam rose from boiling peanuts, scratched records blared through the speakers, and the wind's touch blew faded magazines onto the ground as my mother and I started our visit that cool crisp morning. Among the cast-iron pots, tarnished silverware, costume jewelry, and dolls in soiled dresses peering from their cribs, stood a little old woman about five feet tall; her hair resembled the whiteness of baby's breath. I watched my mother, seemingly mesmerized by the old lady, while no one else paid the woman any attention.

Hovering above me, an immense oak tree cast a shadow across my body as I shifted my attention to young children; they danced around grandparents who shopped with downcast eyes and arthritic joints. A handful of people looking for a bargain arrived in brand new red and silver Cadillacs; the majority of customers came out of necessity, walking on calloused feet. Wiry beards and untamed mustaches hid the dry lips of primitive mountain men. After reaping the sloping fields, they had developed scarred legs and worn coarse hands. Several women smelled of hand-made lavender soaps, and they passed under the ancient oak where I remained standing. Subsequently, the white-haired lady slowly limped by; her appearance contrasted sharply with the landscape of archaic mountain people that walked around us.

I stood next to my mother beneath the oak and watched her eyes gaze intently upon the old woman who proudly wore a blue checkered dress, obviously hand-washed and well-pressed. Her face told the story of her struggles in life. Careful thought seemed to precede each step as she touched unique items lying upon the plywood saw-horse tables. She squinted, looking down at a blue velvet painting of multi-colored flowers in a vase. I turned, stared into my mother's eyes, and knew she realized that the painting meant a great deal to the old woman. The white-haired woman reached into her purse to search for the seven dollars the dealer had demanded; as my mother desperately looked for her wallet, I noticed that her complexion whitened. The old woman's coins dropped to the ground as she searched her pockets. Combining all of her resources, the old woman had the seven dollars necessary to pay for her painting. Breathless, my mother sighed in relief after she heard the old woman in a whispering voice reply to the vagrant dealer, "I tell you, my life had always been tough, but it looks like I've been blessed with just enough."

My mother's contentment seemed interwoven with the old woman's happiness. She would have done anything in her power to help this person who asked out of life no greater treasure than a simple painting. This facet of my mother's personality had been expressed before with family and friends, but I did not expect her concern to embrace an unknown woman in an unfamiliar town.

Looking up at her bright blue eyes and golden hair laced with silver, I said to my mother, "You must be a saint!" Responding with a smile, Mom seemed embarrassed

that I had been watching her. She lifted her hands from her side and placed them on my shoulders. Her silence enabled me to comprehend her feelings. In my eyes, the old woman appeared a stranger, but not in my mother's; compassion and kindness have no territorial boundaries.

by Fran Miller

photo by Haley Hall

Small Grandness

Dancing stars
Surround the moon
Envying its grandness

Shining brightly
The moon
Holds itself
Against the sky
As if
He owns it
The stars
Like ants
Seem a pest
To the moon
He flicks them off
His shoulder
As they fall
I make a wish
Just because
The moon
Can't see
Their small grandness
Doesn't mean I don't

Yin/Yang

I've seen the sunrise
The smell of morning dew
I've seen darkness
Fade
To yellow hues, golden skies

The battle between sunrises, sunsets
The peace I find
In the warfare

I've known sunsets
With its purples and grays
The smell of pollution
Drifting
Away

I've seen moments whenthe night clears the day
The day clears the night
And each triumphs
In the war

Both by Erika Sexton

photo by Renee Frye

My Heart, I think, is a Dancer

"Bashfulness,"
said my mother
when I was five,
"It is nothing but bashfulness
that keeps her back."

My father could not be bothered to guess.

Said my heart, "It is fear of the dance."

"Brilliance,"
said my mother
when I was seventeen,
"It is surely disdain
which binds our child."

My father had nothing to offer and, so,
went golfing.

Wept my heart, "It is fear of the dance."

"Injured youth,"
says my mother
Now.
"It is injured youth that nearly killed her."

She speaks to herself and does not bother with
my father.

"It was fear of the dance," I reply.
My smile, my heart, are bashful and brilliant,
not without a hint of disdain.

I am learning how to dance.
I do not mind the fear.
What is it, after all, to fear?
But not to dance,
Ah, that's a shame.

by Christie Manley

Nightly Ritual

Door slams

She screams silently

A lamp falls
Glass breaks
On the cement
Floor

A bottle spills
As chills enter
The room

Door slams

Words scream
"Let me in"
Sobs echo
From the bathroom
"Please no!"

Door breaks

Silent screams
Turn to
Violent screams
Echoing to the
Bedroom

Sobs pant
"No"
Bottle placed
Near the bed
She hopes
He passes out soon

Bruises surface
Scars form

He sleeps

She cries
Silently

prize winner

3rd place

by Erika Sexton

Happy Curtains

Today I decided to go shopping! I was tired of doing nothing but sit on my butt all day long! So, I decided to spend some money! It's my money! Money my mother left me, and I should be able to spend it any way I want! I'll worry about what Jud has to say later! I'm sure he'll have something to say ; he has something to say about everything I do or don't do these days! I remember how daddy always complained when mama did things he didn't like, just like Jud does.

Jud is still not home! He's been coming home late a lot, and sometimes he doesn't come home at all. I really don't mind when he stays out all night. I then have time to myself, time to think, or read. I love a good book! Ever since I was a little girl, reading has been my way of escaping the reality of my life. I can pretend I'm someone else. These days, I really wish I was someone else.

Mrs. Atwood, the old widow next door came by today. She brought fresh-baked sour dough bread and made-from-scratch butter cookies. She said she had nothing else to do, and she loved to cook, and enjoyed sharing what she makes. I think all that food was her way of snooping into my life. She asked about all the racket coming from our apartment last night. She seemed worried and concerned, but I told her Jud was playing the stereo loud, and the TV was on. I just made up something. I'm too scared to let her know, to let anyone know! What if Jud was to find out?

Anyway, I'm still not working; Jud doesn't want me to. I don't mind not working, I just get so bored having nothing to do all day long. Of course I go to aerobics in the morning, but that's just an hour or so! After that I sit here and tune in to the ever changing lives of people who don't really exist. Sometimes I feel like I don't exist. I can't believe it's already 8:30! I don't think Jud will be home tonight. I know by now, if he's not home by 9:00, he won't be back. I know too well where he is, Jack's Bar and Lounge; the same place we went for our first date five years ago. Back then, Jack's was a nice place, but since then, business has gotten pretty bad, and the bar is just not the same, I can just see Jud slouched over the old bar, stained with rings made by wet glasses and cigarette burns, sipping his usual bourbon and coke, and puffing away on a Camel Special Light . That's my Jud, still wearing his crumpled grey suit, the one I pressed this morning; his chestnut hair, toussled from running his fingers through it over and over, and all he can do is say , "Hey, Jack! How about another?"

Last week I found a bright red lipstick smudge on his shirt. I guess he's developed a liking to extra-curricular sex. I know he likes blondes; maybe I should dye my hair blonde.

I really am glad Jud won't be home tonight. This way, I won't have to live through all the kicking and screaming, just like daddy used to scream at Mama. I won't have to watch Jud break the things he knows I love! Last week, he threw my great-grandmother's vase across the room! He

knew how much I loved that vase! Ever since he started drinking like this, well... he's not the man I married two years ago.

When we were dating, Jud never drank like he does now. Yeah, a drink every now and then but he was never so drunk he hurt me! I keep asking myself , when did all this happen? Did I do something? I just don't know! I t hink about when Daddy started hitting and drinking, and I try to remember what mama did. And then, then I remember--nothing, just like me. I wonder, in twenty years if I'll come home one day and find Jud dead, the way Mama found Daddy, who drank himself to death. I wonder. When Jud comes home, on the nights he does come home, as soon as he walks through the door, the smell of stale cigarettes and cheap liquor reek from each piece of clothing he wears! He looks at me with those glassy green eyes, the same way he always looks at me when he wants something! Before he started drinking like this, he'd make my heart melt when he looked at me that way! Now, it sickens me because I know what he wants. He closes the bright, yellow curtains...happy curtains...he lies down beside me, and I freeze at the touch of his hot hand running up and down my thigh. I close my eyes tight, and don't even try to fight him. What's the point? He's bigger than me, stronger than me, and he'd only hurt me more if I tried to resist him! So, I think about what makes me happy: chocolate ice cream with rainbow sprinkles, furry calico cats, like Jasper, the one I had when I was eight, and bright, sunny days with a big blue sky and cotton candy clouds. I remember happy days with Jud. We'd go for long drives in the country, and pick out shapes in the clouds. Jud always saw trains, and I saw a lot of ducks. He would do this Charlie Chaplin impression that made me laugh until tears streaked my face, and my stomach hurt. Jud could always make me laugh. I never laugh anymore. Life was good then. He hadn't found that bottle, and I didn't have to make up stories about falling off the bed and hitting my face on the side table. I remember Mama's bruises. She said all that mattered was that she was alive. Alive. Was she alive? Am I alive?

I look at all the bruises that cover my body; they look so painful, but Mama was right, they don't hurt, not like the bruises left on my heart anyway. When Jud and I started dating, he promised to never break my heart, but promises and hearts really do get broken. I wonder which one hurts more.

He's home.

by Ellen Giard

3rd place
prize winner

A million miles from anywhere

Darkness s u r r o u n d s us
No moon, no stars dot the dark, blank sky
We stand on the edge of the world
The ocean laps at the shore around us,
Swirling beneath our bare feet.
It envelopes us
Stretches into o b l i v i o n .
The salt water is like black oil,
Covering the brown sand
Sweeping it out to sea,
Grain by grain
In a thunderous crash of waves and foam.
We talk softly
Almost whispering
As if afraid to tamper with the sea's
Eternal balance
As if the sea will not still crash
Upon the defenseless shore
Long after we are gone
Just as it did long before we arrived.

by Abby Cavenaugh

prize winner
2nd place

photo by Allison Sherman

Where Are You ?

Watching the moon s l i d e into the sea,
I wonder where you are,
and wish your arms were around me now
your warm hazel eyes locked onto mine
as the circle of light descends into
the endless, churning blackness.
Maybe you are witnessing this event
on some distant shore,
your own darkness
black as the sea;
a monster beneath
the surface,
like my old friend
loneliness.

by Amy Cavenaugh

Cup of Coffee with Conversation

BY SAMANTHA JONES

Conversation fills the room,
As he slouches with his
Marlboro man grin.
Conversation's dead; she thinks so.
Air bulldozes desperation her way
Like an unwelcome piece of baggage.
Twirls her blonde lock
Around a stiletto of wine with everything.
Lingering anticipation
Deteriorates into ashes of fallacy.
Piercing his vapid scowl with her sardonic facade
Inevitable lurches into indifference.
Conversation's over when he leaves,
Surrenders her crumbled goodbye,
To the last swill of seething calamity.
Conversation's dead, suffocating in the muddy
Irish Cream sludge at the bottom
Of her forsaken cup.

photo by Katherine Costa

MOCHA

Oh darling!
Do tell me what I can do for you
this lovely spring day!

I don't know about you,
but oh...
I just feel like
Singing!
La
Dee da
    La da
        Dee!

Ahh...
How wonderful!
Don't you just
Adore showtunes?

Mmhh... Oh darling,
Do excuse me,
I must have another cup of
Mocha...
Ahhh...

...I was reminiscing
not long ago, about the summer
I directed
Carnival... Yes!
How splendid!

Any
  Way...
What a marvelous production!
Some rehearsals lasted until
ohhh...
I
 don't
    know!

I just remember saying to my cast:
" I have no where to be until 9:30 a. M.,
It's only 10:30 p. M. Now,
and I don't mind staying
all night!

And that damn Sammy!
What a nuisance! Always in the way!
  "Damn it Sammy!"
I'd yell over
and
   over!
Ha! Ha! Ha!

But I had my scotch
to get me through long rehearsals!
Those days...

Now darling,
did I mention how
wonderful you look?

But anyway...

Tell me,
what
can I
do
for you
today?

bY:
ELLEN GIARD

Discovering Daddy with the Divine Intervention of Neil Young

Vivian stared at the pile of clothes on her bed. Nothing jumped out at her as being an appropriate Halloween costume. The only thing she had that remotely resembled anything scary was a matted clown wig she had worn when she was six, and some of her mother's old pink polyester leisure pants. Not wanting to look like a demented *Brady Bunch* clown, she had already ruled out that collaboration.

Scattering her clothes on the floor, Vivian flopped on the bed and sighed. There was no hope for her to win the heart of Jayson, the love of her fifteen-year-old life, in an outfit like that. He would think she was an idiot, and she would just die from the humiliation of his rejecting her. Whenever Vivian thought of calling Jadelyn, her sixteen-year-old best friend, to tell her the most logical excuse—that she had contracted the mysterious Mongolian Flu and her nose was as big as a water balloon, therefore preventing her from leaving the house—she chickened out. Jadelyn and her boyfriend, Sid, had planned this party for a week now, so there was no possible way Vivian could back out. She had to go in something original, so Jayson would notice her apart from all the other wallflowers and ask her to dance. He was a senior, and she a freshman, so the odds of them getting together were already against her; however, Jadelyn had said that Jayson told her that he thought Vivian was a "spastic chick," and that remark showed that he was interested, or at the very least, he had noticed her.

Vivian thought boys were so confusing, but that was part of their allure. Not that she had known many of them in her life; there was just Kurt, her twenty-six-year-old brother, and his friends. With their pot-smoking, beer drinking, devil-may-care attitudes, they were not the best examples of the male race, but they were still the only references she had.

In fact, Kurt was the only father-like person in Vivian's life. He had cared for her and her immature mother, Blythe, since Vivian was a baby. She never knew her father because he had split out on her mother and Kurt the day before Blythe found out she was pregnant with Vivian. He did not want to be saddled with a "corporate life," as Blythe put it when Vivian asked where Daddy was. Daddy was not ready to settle down, get a real job, and be "Mr. John Q. Public," Blythe remarked; he was still into all that flower power crap from the Sixties.

Vivian despised him for leaving her and Kurt stranded with Blythe, who to this day acted like a teenager more than a forty-two-year-old mother. She also hated her daddy for making Kurt grow up so fast. Dear old Daddy had no idea how Blythe had threatened Kurt into giving up all of his dreams to go to college by pulling one of her "I am going to abandon Vivian if you don't stay and help pay the bills" stunts. Kurt had to get a job to make sure the rent was paid and food was on the table; he had to act like the man of the house by making sure that Blythe was not spending her meager earnings from her secretarial job on her druggie boyfriends.

Kurt made her father out to be some poet hippie, not accountable for his family's woes. Vivian thought that excuse was ridiculous, but then Kurt would intercede on their father's behalf, and say some sludge about how he would come back. He had stopped talking about that hope a year ago, but Vivian thought that some days Kurt still believed that their father would come swooping in the door and all their problems would fade away because Daddy was home.

Vivian's thoughts were disturbed by Kurt's knock on her door. He motioned for her to come and help him with the dishes, so she made an effort to get up from her bed, and eventually padded down the hall after him. As she passed the radio, Vivian turned up the volume on the *Nirvana* song that was playing. She suddenly had a brilliant idea, and turned to Kurt, who was washing dishes and singing along with the lyrics.

"I could go as Courtney Love," Vivian

exclaimed, as Kurt laughed and handed her a towel to dry the dishes that were dripping on the sink. "You know, to that Halloween party thing tonight." She looked to him for some sign of encouragement.

"Vivian, you don't have the hair." Kurt said through chuckles.

Vivian looked at the reflection of her long, light brown hair in the pan she was drying. Maybe she could finally go blonde, then she would have enough attitude to get Jayson. She put the pan away and sighed, knowing she would look stupid as a blonde. Kurt handed her another dish from the massive dripping pile.

"Are you sure you want to go to this party thing tonight?" he asked. Vivian looked up at him. He was being unusually nice to her— maybe because he thought that Ian, Jadelyn's older brother, was going to be at the party. Kurt always seemed to feel comfortable and safe when Ian was around to chaperone Vivian and her friends.

Vivian propped herself up on the bar and turned down the radio. "I've only been looking forward to this day since last Saturday when Jadelyn invited me."

"I thought you were mad at her." Vivian shook her head at Kurt's question.

"Kurt, that was then," He pushed some soap bubbles in her lap. She tried to put some back in his thick, dark brown hair. "And this is now."

"Isn't that a bad Emilio Estevez movie?" Kurt said as he swayed his shoulder-length hair out of Vivian's reach. "You could go as Paula Abdul." Vivian wrinkled her nose in disgust.

"Yuck, gross! She's a has-been." Vivian got down off the counter. "Plus she's a lard-filled cow." Vivian puffed out her cheeks and stomach, letting out a loud moo. Kurt wrinkled his brow.

"You could wear padding." He said as he dried the last dish. Vivian stuck her tongue out at him as he flung the wet towel at her. "What's Jadelyn going as?"

"Oh, Sid Vicious's old girlfriend, Nancy Spungeon." Vivian said as she wrung the towel out in the sink. "She and Sid thought it was a good idea since he's going as Sid Vicious." Shrugging his shoulders, Kurt put away the lemon *Joy* dish soap.

"I'm not surprised about Jadelyn's costume." He said. "She has an affinity for tight black leather and being loud and obnoxious."

"I think she looks cool." Vivian responded as she followed Kurt into his room and crashed on his bed. "I helped her pick out the stuff on Monday night." She made room for him to sit down. "We found her a blonde wig, dog collar, and a black leather outfit."

Kurt sat down next to her. "Why don't you go as a hippie?" He glanced at his Neil Young poster and pointed.

"I don't want to go as him. I don't have sideburns like that." Nor did Vivian want sideburns like that. "His sideburns make his face look like it had to be discovered under the fur of Chewbaca." As Kurt stared at her quizzically, Vivian let out a loud chuckle. "Or maybe Neil Young is the original Chi-Sideburns. Just add water.." She collapsed into laughter and Ch-Ch-Chi noises.

"No, stupid," Kurt said as he lightly punched Vivian in the arm. "What I meant was—" Vivian made an attempt to punch him back as he grabbed her arm. "Mom has a fringed vest like the one Neil Young's wearing. I think I know where it is." Kurt said as he rose from the bed, mumbling.

Vivian followed Kurt into their "junk room," which was cramped full of boxes and old, musty-smelling stuff. Kurt dumped out one box marked *Clothes*, and dived right into the mess that spilled from inside.

"Check out these boots." Kurt held up a pair of brown suede, Indian-style boots. Vivian cringed; they were dirty and old. "You could wear these with this dress." He pulled out a white, flimsy dress that resembled a sheet. It had a beaded belt and matching headband. "Pretty groovy, huh?" Kurt flashed a peace sign as he put on the headband and handed her the dress.

"Yeah, far out." Vivian said sarcastically. "Where's the vest?"

Kurt lifted some bell bottoms and held up the vest. "Right here. Oh wait," He paused, producing a weathered brown suede fringed coat. "Kurtland Evan Woodward."

Vivian watched him read off the tag. She had only heard her father's name a couple of times. Kurt had given her a picture of him once when she had

asked him out of curiosity what Daddy looked like. Vivian had memorized that picture, as faded and dingy as it was. She wanted a face to put her hate upon, and there he was in that picture. In that coat, Daddy was looking tough next to his Harley, his brown hair folding down his shoulders, and a cigarette in his mouth. He reminded her of Jack Nicholson mixed with Nick Cage in that stupid pose. She saw her eyes in his. There was no end to her torture.

"I want to wear that." Vivian reached for the coat. Kurtland Evan Woodward owed her something.

"I don't think that would be cool with Mom." Kurt said as he started to put it back in the box with the other piles of clothes on the floor. "She might get real mad if she sees you."

"She won't see me. She's out with her boss, Frank Keller, remember?"

Kurt shook his head. "What happened to Todd?"

Vivian shrugged. Todd was one man on a list of many repugnant boyfriends that Blythe usually picked up in the local bars. Vivian's mother changed boyfriends as frequently as she changed her underwear, which was every day. Vivian had become accustomed to this fact of her mother's life. "Todd and Mom were fighting about something last Sunday." Vivian picked up her father's jacket and put it on. It was big on her, but for some reason she liked the way it engulfed her body. Vivian got the urge to cry, but she suppressed it by saying, "I think it was about the Frank thing." She looked down at the mess Kurt was stuffing back into the box. "Seems that Todd made the mistake of thinking he and Mom were joined at the hip after two beers and a night of humping." Vivian picked up the rest of her costume before Kurt put it back in the box. "I think I'll wear this hippie crap as a costume." She helped Kurt up. "You had a good idea." Vivian said through a smile.

Kurt got up and the pair walked back to his room. "You can wear my wooden cross necklace and those round sunglasses if you want." Kurt pointed Vivian to the top of his dresser where the necklace and the sunglasses were spread out.

"You mean the wooden cross you stole off of Tom Staleigh in gambling over that *Sega* game last week?" Vivian recalled how cleverly her brother had beaten his friend Tom at *Sonic the Hedgehog*. "Thanks, it kinda reminds me of the cross I wore when I went as a nun."

Kurt laughed. "Yeah, when you were six. You were so into that *Flying Nun* thing. I remember when you said you'd be better than Sally Field." Kurt put his hands behind his head. "Remember when I used to dress you up? Those were some good times." Vivian nodded and smiled. She realized suddenly that she was jealous of Kurt. After all, he had eleven years of Halloweens with Daddy to dress him up and take him trick-or-treating.
She directed her gaze away from Kurt and to the Neil Young poster, mustering up strength to speak.

"Did Daddy take you trick-or-treating?" She paused and turned to face Kurt. "Did he dress you up?"

"Yeah, I don't really remember, though." Kurt bit his lip. "Oh, but there was this one time he dressed me up as Neil Young." Vivian made a face to convey her disgust, and thought her brother was lying. "No, really Vivi, he did. I think I was five. That *Rust Never Sleeps* tour was going on, or something."

"So Daddy was into Neil Young?" Kurt nodded as Vivian sat down on the bed next to him. "Yeah. He told me he met Neil on the highway once. I think it was when he and Mom were hitching to Berkeley." Vivian could tell Kurt idolized their father, by having such awe for him. Vivian could not idolize or love someone she hardly knew.

She put her costume on the bed and leaned into her brother. Kurt stroked her head and said, "Dad told me that Neil was real nice, just like any average guy you'd meet on the street." Kurt reached for a cigarette with his free hand. "I think Dad thought Neil was a prophet or some bull like that." He lit his cigarette and inhaled. Vivian hugged her brother. He seemed shocked, but then easily accepted her arms about him. "Am I that cheesy?" he said as she buried her head in his chest.

Vivian mumbled, "Yeah, you must be getting old like Neil." In that moment, she felt close to her brother.

"You be good tonight." He stroked her hair. "Stay out till around twelve. I'm going over to Tom's

house after work, but I should get in around twelve-thirty."

"The party might suck, so I might catch you at Tom's." Vivian made an attempt to get up as she moved away from Kurt. "I don't really want to come home to an empty house."

"Vivi," Vivian turned back to Kurt. "You can talk to me, you know," his voice trailed off into silence. "About Dad and stuff."

"Are we in an *Afterschool* special?" Kurt started to throw a pillow at Vivian. "Kurt, I tell you everything. Besides, I know enough." She began to hum *Heart of Gold* as she left the room to go change.

Kurt shook his head and flashed a peace sign. "I have created a monster."

By: Samantha Jones

Beneath the Veil

I had been fixated at my desk, smoking my cigarette, just staring at that damn ball of clay. Usually, my hands would dive right into that ball and create characters of uniqueness with strong features. Usually, I could create something artistic and original. But that night I was helpless, sitting on my stool, head in hands, aggravated at my lack of creativity and individuality.

Sighing, I stubbed out my smoke and got up from the table. I put on my Beethoven CD and pushed the track button 7-*Moonlight Sonata.*

Feeling the slowness of the piece, I drifted back to the table - but not to sit down. No, I was through probing my artistic side. I just wanted to grab my bottle of wine, take a few swigs, angrily gulp it down, and walk around the room, feeling sorry for myself.

I was glad to have the apartment to myself. I am not the type of person who minds being alone. On the contrary, that night I was rather fond of not having anyone around to bug me. I particularly liked getting drunk by myself, because then I could dance and make a fool of myself with no one to watch me.

Weaving my hands into the air, at the pleasant monotony of Beethoven's piece, I floated around the room, looking at all the details of the room, looking both carefully and with dread at all the details of the room. Yes, every last gloomy detail. From the dingy yellow couch with its worn fabric, to the musty, murky brown recliner with the stuffing coming out, to the morbid pictures on the wall, drawn by yours truly.

The only thing I liked about this whole damn apartment was the three floor-to-ceiling windows,centered in the middle of the living room wall. Night summer air was sweeping through the windows - cool and haunting - smelling of freshly mowed grass and sending silvery streaks of moonlight onto the window panes. Every now and then, a car would turn onto Blanken St., its headlights sending shadows dancing across the room.

Another sip of wine - yessss... That always did me just fine. I let my eyes wander across the grubbage of the room to the ivory carpet that had turned to a nice chocolate brown, the old dusty lamps from Good Will and the Salvation Army, a poor excuse for a dining table (a wooden card table that my grandmother had donated after the elements of her bridge group either split or died), and posters: Bob Marley, out in front of an old house on a dirt road, where he's leaning on an old acoustic guitar; the Grateful Dead, four of the members resting their bones on haystacks, with Jerry Garcia in the front with his cigarette in hand and that laugh on his face, a laugh that you can hear just by looking at his picture. Wanting to add color to the room, I had once put tapestry on the wall. My plan had backfired because it was a bright colored tie-dye and its contents did not cooperate much with the musty yellows and dark browns. I had kept it up all the same, though. After all, I'd blown thirty bucks on the damn thing - might as well leave it up.

Another sip of wine - Ahhhh, yessss.....As I sank into the recliner, for some odd and disturbing reason I began to think about my little brother, Eli.Helooked

like mom and dad. He had the same petite figure, the same blue eyes, and the same tawny hair that was high lighted so delicately in bursts and waves of curls. He was smart like mom and dad, too. He made straight A's and was the only twelve-year-old boy I knew who turned down baseball games with the neighborhood kids so he could read and study.

I thought about the small and culture-less town that I came from. The people there were so brain dead. They had a pure hatred for anybody who did not look like they did, and act as they did, and dress like they did, and believe what they did. In a town like this, I had always been aware of all the things I was doing wrong. I had never been accepted by people my age. Adults thought of me as a freak and a trouble-maker, because I had strong views that went against the norm. For example, I always argued the side of atheism, homosexuality, and the rights of criminals and drug addicts. I enjoyed being the devil's advocate, both because being so shocked people - got a reaction from them - and because it was the only pleasure I got from living there. Most of the topics that I argued about in class or whatever, weren't even what I really believed. More times than not, I'd have no opinion one way or the other on what I was arguing about. But it was the *sake* arguing that I loved. People began to have such demented judgements of me, that I actually tried to live up to them.

Needless to say, it was a great relief to go away to college - come here, to this world of my own, to this isolation, and to this hole of denial and self-pity where my only escape was this bottle of wine and an occasional burst of tragic inspiration that may or may not guide my hands into a frenzy of creation upon a greyish, warm lump of clay. Sculpting has always been my only release - my outlet - and, without it, I was frustrated, unwhole, and insane with feelings of worthlessness.

As I sat in that damn chair, getting drunker and drunker, I thought about everything, until the room was spinning like a merry-go-round, so that I could almost hear the organ music in the background.

I finally thought about Issac and how much my vulnerable and naive soul had whispered "love," when I met him my freshman year of college. At the time he seemed to be the answer to all my questions and problems - a cure for my loneliness, and the perfect antidote for my life that had seen so much emptiness. It had been three years since I met him and a lot had changed since we first discovered each other, in a time of excitement and new beginnings. I began to think about all the fights, and all the cheating that had followed in the next two and a half years and how we would never be the same again. Three years ago, I was about twenty years younger. I didn't know half of what I knew presently. Because of that, I had been a little bit happier, and a little less sad. He had led me to a temporary contentedness, only to leave me more depressed and lonely in the end.

I thought about how wrong the world was and how unfair it seemed to bring a life into a world like this. And then I began to wonder, very seriously, why my "natural" mother (the one who had given me up for adoption years ago) had not just had an abortion. Obviously, my life was a mere

accident - not to mention, what must have been a horrifying discovery to those who created it. So then, why the hell was I here? Surely it wasn't fate or destiny for me to be sitting here on this recliner, puzzling over why I'm here.

And then an idea began to form from the darkness.

I set my wine bottle down on the floor and pushed my heavy self up out of 'the pit.' Because of my drunkenness, I could hardly see, and whatever was still working in my head was swarming to try to distinct one object from another.

The apartment was almost completely dark. I had lit all of my candles, and the flickering orange-yellow patterns on the wall were the only light visible, except for the occasional car that would send headlights into my window. The dancing purple glow of the purply-pink candle, the red glow from the tall red one, the white glow from turqouise drip candle, the blue gow of the wizard candle — the only life in the room — those colorful, happy, wavering spots on the wall that stretched out and pulsed and lingered to the steady pulse of *Moonlight Sonata*, the notes lingering in the air like audible prisms. The slow, drawn-out monotony made my movement slow and legs feel numb and heavy (...or was it the wine?...), making my feet feel as if they were carrying my heavy clay abstraction around them.

I made my way to the bathroom; finally reaching it on a long journey down the hall, where the walls often had to stop me from surrendering to gravity. I turned on the switch. My eyes squinted in agony at the bathroom light and, while they were adjusting, I somehow managed to drag my leaden feet to the sink where I reached the medicine cabinet.

I pulled myself to a full stand (just like Eli used to do when he was first learning to walk) and slid the mirror door open, trying successfully to do so without seeing my reflection. My tipsy finger knocked down the bottles of Midol, different kinds of suntan lotions, and a box of Q-tips, before I finally found what I had been looking for. I rested the tips iof my fingers on the tiny brown bottle and, grasping it, I brought it closer to my face where I could read the prescription label.

"Yes, sir, I do believe this is it!" I slurred aloud, after reading"

'The Prescription Shop'
Phone: 832-7719
5247-649 Blanken St.
Columbia, SC 13278
Dr. Majors, Priscilla
Rachel M. Whitman Filled 4/27/95'

Blah...Blah...Blah...Then at the bottom left-hand corner - just what I had been searching for:

'Prozac 100mg'

That was the extra bottle I'd had before I quit taking the crap. It hadn't done anything for me, but make me numb and tired. But I figured that it could do something for me that particular night.

Now, stumbling, I found my way back to the recliner. Reaching down, I grabbed the bottle of wine and even smiled as I retrieved it. I took a gulp for good luck and then, after 3-4 minutes of a nerve prickling struggle, unscrewed the top to the bottle of Prozac.

My *Moonlight Sonata* must have ended while I was in the bathroom, so I put another CD in to fill the empty space in the air. I hadn't

looked at the CD label, but it ended up being the Doors - a perfect choice. I sat back and closed my eyes while I listened to the bass go lower and lower until the guitar came in slowly and with a sad and original sound, kind of hollow and empty - but with meaning. The notes of the bass jumping up and then inching back down, the guitar starting off with a question, then resolving with sadness. Next would come the voice of the legendary, one-of-a-kind, Jim Morrison. As drunk as I was, and now getting really dizzy, too, I could have sworn to God that he was singing straight to me, jumping through the years and into my living room to tell me what I already knew:

"You're Lost, Little Girl,

You're Lost, Little Girl,

You're Lost, Little Girl,

You're lost, tell me who

are you?"

The music would get abit livelier here, and more upbeat. But Jim always went back to that sadness that people could understand through his music. Intervals would sometimes become cheerful momentarily, but they would always wind up sad again, because Jim knew the truth. And I know he died, trying to live the truth.

Ohhh...the song made me picture myself feeling sorry for myself in a cooler apartment. It made me feel like being in a movie, where I'd be bawling my eyes out, but still looking gorgeous. I would wander out onto the balcony, where all my plants were sitting, and rest my pretty, petite bones on the bar stool on the fire escape and overlook a scene from (maybe) Venice Beach, California, or somewhere interesting like that. Men would look up to me from the street and admire me, but I'd be oblivious to them, because I was too busy pouting and brooding over my vain situation.

But when I opened my eyes again, I was back in the meaningless void, in my recliner, not a man around for miles, and brooding over things that were anything but vain.

I began to gulp down as many of the pills as I could manage.

One sip of wine, 2 sips of wine - got that mouthful down...

I took some more pills.

One sip of wine, 2 sips of wine, 3 sips of wine - got that mouthful down...

I put even more in my mouth.

One sip of wine, 2, 3, 4 - 4 sips of wine - here we go...

My mouth voluntarily let out a nice-sized belch, that sounded as if it came from the depths of my soul. I sighed with relief, wiped my mouth the way that drunkards often do, and laid my head back on the rotting chair.

"You're Lost Little Girl...Lost Little Girl...Lost Little Girl..."

I knew that this was destiny. I was doing what nature had intended to do in the first place.

I looked at the empty bottle of pills and felt my stomach churn and roll. I hoped I wouldn't puke, but I wasn't so sure because my head was dizzy with static animations and loud buzzing. I could feel the tears swell in my throat until they hurt me, but I knew I wouldn't have the time or the energy to release them.

But the tears came anyway. I looked

around the room, one last time, almost regretting what I had done, but not even wanting to go back. Through the mirror of my tears the candlelight was distorted and gave me bad vibes of what was to become of me. The tears rolled endlessly now and I asked (whoever) why it had come to this.

Going to the window, I knelt before it, hoping for a car to ride by. I wanted to see these lights just one more tome. I wanted to see some sign of life - human existence - even if it was only a car off in the distance. I thought that maybe I wouldn't feel so alone when I died, if I could see one last car - one last set of headlights - brighten up my living room. But I would have no such luck. It was too late for cars to be traveling down this street. And, for some reason, this fact made tears flow even harder, feel colder on my cheeks. In what must have looked like desperation, I placed my hands on the screen of the window so that I could feel the night air breeze come in to cleanse my soul, and lighten that sick feeling.

I looked below me, onto the parking lot, and at the weeping willow beside the volleyball court. The breeze lifted strands of hair and cooled my face. I could almost picture my grandfather's grave, below it. And I began to think about him.

I'd never learned much about God, but I remembered from my paternal grandfather's funeral, hearing the priest say: "Paul Whitman has 'gone home' to be with his loved ones and his creator." I had always remembered that line. I had liked the sound of it so much. It had always been comforting to me, for some reason or another. It had made me feel more peaceful, not only about my grandfather's death but about death in general. I could see the weeping willow that reached its gentle branches from the tips of its crown to the furthest tips of fingers, sweeping the floor of my grandfather's grave. I wanted my weeping willow, too. I wanted somebody or something to be weeping when I died.

All the same, I was 'going home' - to that great big castle in the sky.

'Going home' to see my loved ones and my creator.

'Going home' - where I could finally belong to something or someone.

'Going home...'

'Going home...'

****

When I woke up in the hospital, I realized that I had not succeeded. The first thing I saw was my father, sitting in a chair, looking out the window. He rested his head on his fist, with one finger aside his face. I felt a burden in my heart to know that I'd hurt him again. He was a good man who had many God-given virtues. His round, gold-framed glasses and his short silver hair brushed forward gave him a retro look. I had always thought he either looked like a monk or a priest or one of those beatnik poets in the 50's or 60's, these with the goatees, dressed in all black. I guess I got these impressions because he usually was wearing black and he spent most of his time in coffee houses because he loved the authentic atmosphere.

I was most like him. He told me once that - before he married Mom, he used to paint. It is hard today to imagine my father

with an artistic side. However artistic he used to be, though, it apparently wasn't part of him like it was a part of me. My art was "built in, solid and strong," as my father often concluded.

When I had my breakdowns, my father just stood, silent, above me. I would pay a thousand dollars to know what he was thinking. I consider my father to be a very intelligent man, wise and intellectual. He had never known how to help though. No one ever did, because no one could possibly understand what I was going through. My depression was "built in, solid and strong," every bit as much as my artistic strength was. I had been depressed for as far back as I could remember.

My mother walked up to me when she saw me open my eyes. She was maintaining her polite and "southern" composure rather well, given the situation. Her tiny body was well-dressed as usual, her shoulders big, padded like a football player's, her gold jewelry - dangling from her arms, neck, and ears. Her tawny hair was not a stitch out of place; her curls as vibrant as ever, with the reddened glow - softening the texture. She even had make-up on. She must have spent hours getting ready to come see her suicidal nutcase of a daughter in the hospital.

Daddy came over to me and, unable to look me in the eyes, mumbled, "I'm glad to see you're OK." He touched my hand gently as he said so. then , he looked at my mom. "I'm going to get a cup of coffee, " he said quietly.

After he shut the door behind him, Mama cleared her throat.

"Rachel, I don't know what to do anymore," she said. "Would you like to tell me what I can do?"

She sat down and rubbed my hand. "You mean the world to me, Rachel," she said with a soft sincerity. "You're my baby." She began to choke up, and then put her hands up to her face and took a minute to collect herself.

When she uncovered her face, tears were streaming down in silver rivers. "Your daddy and I have been talking about this while you were — uh, unconscious. We think it's about time for us to try to contact your natural mother." Then, with sudden thought, she felt a need to restate that. She said even louder, "Or maybe not to contact her, you know, but to just - maybe," -her hands went in circles as she tried to think how to put it - "just find out some things about her."

This was the last thing I should ever expect her to say. I would have expected her to burst out singing old show tunes before I would have expected her to say this to me.

When I was a child, and a rather rebellious and indignant one, I used to remind my mom that she was not my "real mother." After I hit that age when morale and decency and manners kick in, I realized what an ugly and hurtful thing that was to say, and I have, many times regretted having said that statement. All the same, that was about the time my mom decided to ignore the fact that I was adopted. It became something we just didn't talk about. She would never offer that information to anyone, except for maybe medical reasons and/or situations of emergency. But the rest of the

family and I would never mention my having been adopted. I had never thought about why, but just then, I figured that it must be because it hurt mama so much.

"This depression of yours - being down all the time - never being happy -" she stopped and put her fist to her mouth while she thought. She was being so delicate at how she worded things, as if I might break into a million pieces if she said the wrong thing "-is beyond our control, Rachel. Honey, I don't know what to do - I really don't. I have tried - but I CAN'T understand. I have no idea what it is that you need."

Throughout the entire 'conversation' I had managed to escape eye contact, but now, my eyes reached up to hers with a desperate plea of wanting and needing. "How do you guess that contacting my biological mother would help?," I asked.

"This depression of yours - it's got to be genetic. If there was some way we could find out - maybe we could help you if we knew what we were dealing with." She stood up and wrapped her arms around her petite body as she walked to the door to look out the tiny square window, without seeing a thing. She wouldn't even look at me.

"Rachel, ever since you were born, we've done the best we could to provide a decent and loving life for you. I know we made some mistakes. I know we didn't take you to church enough. I know I haven't been very understanding to your needs." She began to lose her voice again as her eyes squinted with the arrival of more tears. She took an old Kleenex out of her pocket and wiped her nose, then she looked over at me.

"But this is all I had left to do - to try. I raised you the best I could and I'm proud of you." She walked back over to the chair but put her fist on the arm of the chair, instead of sitting down. "And I love you and will do anything for you that is humanly possible. But I can't change the fact that I didn't carry you in my womb for nine months." Now, she raised her voice and was arguing like an angry child who has been wronged. "I'd give anything to be able to have that, but I can't and God won't change that. You don't know how much I envy the woman that did - that woman, whoever she is, created a beautiful and loving creature." She was pacing now, with her arms wrapped around her again, with a voice like a preacher's. "But the sadness inside of you has to be another part of *her*." She said this with faint sickness. "And this is something that I simply can't be a part of because I don't understand. I never will understand."

She came back and sat down beside me now, wiping the tears, and looking down at the Kleenex unraveling on her lap. "You don't have to meet her," she said, talking about my biological mother. "We'll leave that up to you. But we feel that we, um, need some kind of, uh," her mind was searching incredibly, "information."

I was taken aback with her speech. What could I say to something like that? I could only look at her. I could only give her an expression. She was right. Something had to be done.

My voice was small and incapable, but managed once more to speak. "I'm sorry, Mama."

She put her arms around me and she embraced me in a way that she never had before and held on to me just the same - for

dear life.

****

And so, two days later, we went to the Social Services where some man in some office was supposed to have some kind of information about my natural mother. His name was Aden Foster - a big man with white hair and a bushy beard. He looked like a cross between Santa Claus and Jerry Garcia.

My parents went with me. I think my dad was friends with Mr. Foster, a fact which, for some reason, struck me as kind of odd. My parents sat outside in the hall, while I went into his office and sat down. He was standing up, going through some papers in a file, while I looked around his office. I didn't see any pictures of children or women, so I assumed he was not married. But he had lots of biblical quotations and phrases in pretty gold frames; I sensed he was a very religious man.

He wasn't what I expected. He didn't look very business-like; instead of wearing a suit, he had on a plaid shirt that was not even tucked in to his khaki pants. He had on what looked like mountain boots.

Having found whatever it was he'd been looking for, he turned around and smiled. "So you want to know some things about your natural mother, hmm?" He had a little bit of a foreign accent.

"Yes, sir," I said, wondering how much he could actually know about the situation.

"Well," he began, "I suppose your parents told you that she was looking for you four or five years ago."

I couldn't comprehend what he was trying to say to me. My parents had never told me anything of the sort. I figured that I could have possibly misunderstood him. "How do you mean?," I questioned.

"Well," he looked up at the ceiling as if it might explain for him. He stopped short and tugged at his beard. "She came into my office four or five years ago and...well...she wanted to know how you were doing."

He was saying the word "she" and referring to my biological mother. This was the woman who chose, for some reason or another, back in 1974, not to abort me. The same woman who put me up for adoption - a woman whom I did not know and had never really imagined knowing.

It was then that I realized that I was sitting in front of a man who *knew* her - who had *seen* her before, and *talked* to her. That fact left me so dumbfounded that I was at a loss for words. My mouth moved and shaped words, but no sound formed.

"I take it then, that your parents did not tell you about that visit."

I could only shake my head, feeling like an idiot because words still would not sound.

He tugged at his beard again, and was kind of at a loss for words himself, but in a different way. He seemed to be struggling, to decide where to begin. And the whole time, my mind was heavy and swarming with questions: What did she talk about? What was her occupation? I didn't know where to begin. If I could have found my voice at this time, it would have flooded the room with these questions. But he spoke first.

"It is very hard for me to know where to start. I am not aware of how much you know."

"Nothing - I know nothing-" my voice was hurried, excited, rushed. I wanted so bad to tell him that I wanted to know *everything*! I wanted to know everything about her - starting with the day that she, herself, was born.

"Your mother -" he stopped and corrected himself - "biological mother- was just fifteen years old when she had you. She was too young to keep you and try to raise you and she had little help where her family was concerned. We know very little about your biological father. We kept trying to get her to bring him in to the office to give us some information, she kept saying he'd come, but he never did."

Wait a minute, I thought. I had never even contemplated having a biological father, too! So is this man telling me that he knew my natural mother when she was pregnant with me?

"She told us only that he was a college student, a healthy young man, who was both intelligent and kind. As far as you and your family wanting to know about her mental status - well..."

Get on with it! I wanted to shout at him. What about her mental status? By his hesitation, I got the impression that she was way far gone or something.

"She had a bad home life. Her father was an alcoholic and was abusive towards her mother. She had run away from home several times, before she became pregnant with you. She was very rebellious and - wild, you might say. But, nevertheless, a sweet girl with a good heart and, as I believed, good intentions." He sighed and began to chew on the tip of his pen, as if he was in deep thought about the subject. "Your depression, my dear, very well may come from her. She was hospitalized for depression before the age of fifteen. She was," he said, looking through his file, "I believe," he was lingering now, "ah, yes, thirteen years. She had a very hard time adapting and adjusting to society."

My eyes wandered to the file. It probably contained everything I could ever hope to know about my natural mother. I searched and strained my eyes until they hurt, trying to catch a glimpse of what might be her name or somehting she said or something that was said about her.

His eyes glanced once more through the file. "What else can I help you with?," he asked, after finally looking up.

I felt a big sort of plastic balloon float up through my throat before I could answer, silently, "I guess that's it."

He sat there and just looked at me, as if he knew I had a lot more questions - as if he knew I was about to burst with anxiety.

"Do you think I might should write her a letter?," I asked stupidly.

He sat there for a while, twisting in his chair, with his finger aside his cheek, deep in thought. "Well," he began, "that's entirely up to you." He stared at me some more, as if trying to get some kind of reaction, though I had none to offer. "I think that if it might help you, you could do it."

"What about her?," I blurted in.

"You mean, what do I think it would do for her?" I nodded. "Well, I think she might appreciate it. However, you must ask yourself if you can stop there. I mean, here is a woman who gave birth to you almost twenty-one years ago. Having any kind of contact with her at all isn't going to be like any other ordinary event in life. I know you

have a hundred questions to ask her and I'm sure she does for you, too. But it'll be hard to write a couple of letters and leave it there. Also, if you ever intend on meeting her, I would seriously suggest months of counseling before doing so."

He left me to think about this while he twirled around in his little gray chair. I felt as if flies were buzzing in my head with crazy swarms of information that I never knew I had access to before. However, one more thing came to mind as I sat there for minutes of hours.

"Does she have a family?," I asked, zeroing my gaze to his as I waited for him to answer.

He stared at me blankly and puckered his lips. "No," he said finally. "She never married or had any other children besides you."

I was in a dream, a hazy dream, where cottony clouds hung over my brain, creating cobwebs and rust as I thought. I could smell the newness of the office and began noticing things about it that I hadn't noticed before, like the strong aroma of cheap cologne and the wooden paneled walls and the musty yellow curtains that probably used to be white.

"Can you just find out where she lives?," I asked. "You know, in case I do decide to write her?"

"I have no idea if she still lives here in Columbia or not, but I'm pretty sure that her parents still live here. I could do whatever possible, if that's what you want."

"How soon could I know something?," I asked him hurriedly, my fingers twisting themselves into knots.

"Well," he said, scratching his head, "that all depends...Now, if she still lives here in Columbia, then I could probably locate her rather quickly. But if she has moved, for any reason, then - well, it's hard to say. I can't give you an approximate estimate. We'll just have to see what we can do, hmmm?"

I thanked him, shook hands with him, and left his office, barely able to mumble a word to my parents on the way out.

They offered to take me out to eat - to any restaurant I wanted to go to - but I couldn't eat a bite, and sensing that, I declined and told them I just wanted to go home.

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Eli was demonstrating all of his latest facts and statistics from school. He talked about how to make bombs, hydrogen atoms, who had the best chances at running for president next term, and other such crap as that. I found it hard not to roll my eyes at him, or just tell him to take his genius ideas somewhere else, to somebody who actually cared.

It had been a week since I had talked to the man at Social Services and I hadn't heard a thing yet. Every time the phone rang, I knew it would be his crazy accent on the other end, telling me some obscene story about how she had died in a fatal plane crash or killed herself or something. I was scared to death of what I might find out. This woman was the answer to every "Who am I?" question I'd asked since I was about ten. She was the answer as to whether or not I'd look like a cow in thirty years, or if I was going to be depressed like this for the rest of my life.

My whole body ached to hear some kind of news - any news at all.

Meanwhile, everybody in my family was driving me nuts. I had come home for a couple of weeks at my mom's request. She was overly sympathetic, catering to my needs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, as though I were a stray puppy dog that she'd found out in a thunderstorm. She also wanted to monitor my every move, as if I might try to kill myself again or something. She was on my case, constantly. It was sweet, in a way, because I knew she was trying desperately to help. But what nobody was understanding was that there was no help. The whole reason I'd tried to off myself in the first damn place was because I was sick and tired of trying to get better, only to be let down time and time again. Trying to help myself get over this depression had only made progress through one aspect; the whole situation was yet another thing in my life that I could fail at successfully.

My dad's eyes were always burning fires behind a wall of glass, worlds away, when he looked at me. He never did confront me at all about what had happened, but he showed me his love and concern the way men often do - giving me money to go out for coffee, letting me watch what I wanted on TV, etc.

I became more and more worried about my birth mother with each passing day that I didn't get that phone call. I couldn't eat or sleep, as I had before, and I'd stay up all night long, playing Solitaire and watching stupid talk show reruns and the Discovery channel. Sometimes, I'd go out on the front porch (the only place I enjoyed going while I was at home) and smoke a cigarette and maybe flip through a magazine. I longed for some kind of drug, or something to make these burdens go away. But I didn't know anyone who could have helped me out in that area, seeing as I didn't exactly have any friends in my hometown - least of all, connections.

Wondering whether my natural mother was alive or dead, I was miserable. The man at Social Services had said himself that he hadn't heard from her since four or five years ago, so that left open many possibilities. She could be married now and have ten kids. I had always wondered what it'd be like to have a little sister, who might be even just a little bit like me. This information could open up a whole new world altogether.

The whole ordeal was too much to bear. The waiting was an incredible teasing that neither my body nor my mind could take. I was miserable with impatience.

OK, so I had found out that my depression was linked to my natural mother ... That in itself should be almost enough to save me. It meant that I wasn't crazy. It meant that there was finally a *reason* as to why I felt like I did and was like I was. But, this new information opened up dimensions of needing new information and generating more questions.

I tried, again and again, to work on my sculpture. It pissed me off that I would take so much time getting my tools together, only to sit there and stare at the damn thing like an idiot. I had managed to get the impression of half of a warped face, when the phone finally beckoned me, (two and a half weeks after my meeting at Social Services).

"Hello?," I had asked, shakily, though

I truly didn't believe this would be the call.

"Yes, Rachel?," the foreign accent probed over the phone.

I was frozen fast into the mold I had been in when I first heard his voice, weeks before. I was ready for anything and, at the same time, worlds away from trying to begin to understand the whole sordid situation. I closed my eyes, paralyzed instantly, and briefly the haunting voice that might as well have belonged to Elvis Presley:

"I am sorry to say that -"

Oh my God, I thought. *I'm not prepared for this yet.* Deep breath. Deep breath.

"I was unable to get in touch with your biological mother."

My mouth could finally shape the words: "And why not?" almost accusingly, as if this man might be her kidnapper, looking for a ransom or something.

"I talked to her mother -"

I'd never thought of her as having a mother, too.

"-And she informed me that your birth mother has moved out west."

...And?, I wanted to ask. He was supposed to get in touch with her. I didn't know if there had been some kind of miscommunication, but I had assumed that meant he would do so, even if she had ended up living in Budapest.

"So you haven't talked to her?," I asked.

"No, I haven't. But I found out where she lives. Now the decision of what to do about it is yours, and only you can make that decision, Rachel."

I wanted to throw the phone out the window. I hadn't been prepared for this. What was this crap? It wasn't fair. Nothing was fair. Nothing ever had been and nothing ever would be.

I simply thanked him and told him I may contact him later.

No one else was in the house. They had all gone some place or another. This new knowledge was something I had to face on my own anyway. It wouldn't have been the same had anybody else been with me when I heard. This involved me - and no one else in the world could come into that picture or be a part of them whether I wanted them to or not.

I went to the porch for a smoke and sat in the old green wooden swing. I felt the sunshine on my face. I heard children, somewhere, laughing and playing, probably like I used to do when I was just a child myself. I heard lawn mowers and smelled the fresh cut grass all around me. I could hear an ice cream truck, maybe 3 or 4 miles away. I remembered how happy that ice cream truck used to make me. Then I thought about how all kinds of little things used to make me happy when I was little - back when I was too young to know and to understand things that were complex enough to make me sad.

I looked around at the activities going on in my neighborhood, the mothers outside on the front porch steps, drinking lemonade, while their children played school or Frisbee or Barbie, safely, in the backyard. I looked at the fathers mowing their lawns, and the dogs that barked at young boys on bicycles. I looked, I saw, but more importantly, *I paid attention.*

I sat out there for an hour, *enjoying* the sunlight and the warmth and the smiles from old women as they walked down the

road in their sun visors and plaid shorts. I was, somehow, *content*. I guess that being depressed all that time made me physically sick. It made me unable to get any enjoyment out of anything but escape. I don't know what it was that I was feeling - but it just *felt good.*

As I observed all these people, I came to the conclusion that there are probably not that many people in the world who are actually "happy." Maybe the trick is to just be content.

I sat and looked around me and embraced myself in a summer day. Some kind of resolution had been made within myself, though I wasn't really sure what it was.

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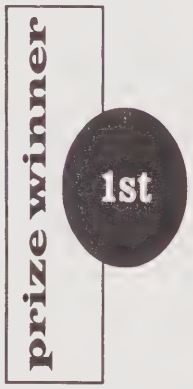
Three weeks later, I was back in my apartment. I realized that, overall, I had enjoyed my stay at home with my family, even though it was nice to be back. Sean, my roommate, was so glad for me to be back home that she cooked me dinner. I opened up all the windows to let the outside air in; it made me feel more peaceful. I looked forward to starting school back. I needed something to keep me preoccupied.

I'd written my natural mother a hundred, thousand and one letters, but none of them could say what I wanted them to. I supposed that maybe I simply wasn't ready to deal with any of that yet. And so, I decided to leave the case in the hands of fate, though I felt it was not all over. My instincts kept telling me....*One day.*

When I lay down that night to go back to sleep, I felt a relief to be back in this dingy apartment. I was especially happy to be back in my own bed. I looked around my room and thought about the "road to recovery." I wondered if there was such a thing. I had been asking myself a lot of questions lately. Even though I never came up with much in the way of answers, developing theories was at least a start.

I looked over at the window sill, where my new sculpture sat. The young clay woman that I had produced had a proud face with strong features. Her eyes told stories and made inquiries. And she had a face that, beneath a veil of sadness, was my very own.

by Ann Currier



D'Artagnan

Not long ago
your silver and gray fur nestled
against me,
your sparkling green eyes
gazed at me
trustingly -- or hungrily
when all you **w a n t e d** was cheese.
Your eyes and mouth outlined in white
a bit of black about your lips,
emphasizing your prissy ways.
You were here when
my heart was broken
and when faith was restored,
listening patiently
as I complained, then rejoiced;
Now I dream
you are at the screen door
your **s q u e a k y** meow
begging me to let you in.

by Amy Cavenaugh

photo by Amy Cavenaugh

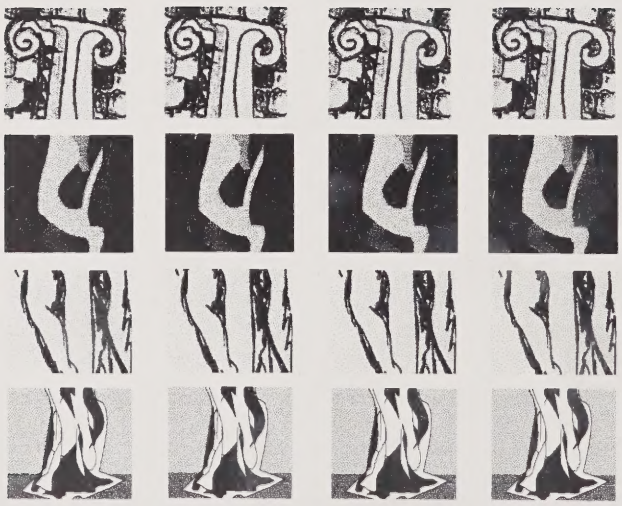
Memories

She walks the streets
trying to take in
all of the hauntingly familiar scenery
She casually observes
her childhood playground
now littered with
a few sparse patches of grass
and ragged, old equipment
She closes her eyes
trying to **r e c a p t u r e**
her youthful innocence
trying to go back
to a time when she
only remembered the
sunny days and grassy meadows
But she hears a sound
and opens her eyes
she is back
now filled only with remorse
wishing she had just
stayed away
In her useless attempt
to recapture her childhood
she has **s t o l e n** memories

by Joanna Shapiro

B-4 you go...

photo by Katherine Costa



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